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SUBJECT: SERBIA: DEMOCRATS WIN OUTRIGHT MAJORITY IN VOJVODINA
PROVINCE

REF: A) BELGRADE 508, B) BELGRADE 468, C) BELGRADE 474

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Summary

1. (SBU) The Democratic Party won an outright majority in the May 25 runoff elections for Serbia's Autonomous Province of Vojvodina's parliament. Low voter turnout helped the Democrats win, as Radical voters stayed home. The provincial win is a major boost for the DS as it negotiates to form a government on the national level. End Summary.

Democrats Win

2. (SBU) Voters provided the Democrats a solid majority in the May 25 runoff election for 60 of the Vojvodina autonomous parliaments's 120 seats (Ref A). The DS-led coalition "For a European Vojvodina" (ZEV) won 41 seats, according to preliminary DS data. (The Provincial Election Commission has until 2000 local on May 30 to release final results.) Combined with the 23 proportional representation seats that ZEV won in the first round on May 11, ZEV will have an absolute majority of 64 seats. The Radicals (SRS) will control 24 seats, the Hungarians 9, Together for Vojvodina (the coalition led by Nenad Canak's League of Vojvodina Social Democrats--LSV) 6, the Democratic Party of Serbia/New Serbia Coalition (DSS/NS) 6, the Socialists (SPS/PUPS) 4, and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) 1. In addition, various independent citizen groups will hold six seats.

Low Voter Turnout

3. (SBU) For the May 25 runoff, voter turnout was only 34.5%, compared to 61.75% in the first round. Voter apathy may be growing as Vojvodina voters were asked to go to the polls for a fourth time since January. Radical voters appeared to have stayed away en masse, which worked to the advantage of the DS. David Bell (Amcit), Chief of Party of the International Republican Institute, told us on May 27 that the silence from Radical voters was an electoral anomaly since SRS voters are known to be the most disciplined. Bell described Radical voters as "confused" as Kosovo slips further from the headlines and even Radical leaders say they want to see Serbia have a future with Europe. According to LSV head Nenad Canak, Radical voters did not care about Vojvodina because they believed the real power was in the center, at the national level. Radical voters

had only shown up on May 11 because of the national and local elections also held that day, Canak told us on May 27.

Next Steps

¶4. (U) Although the Democrats have an outright majority, they may still decide to form a coalition provincial government with other parties. Doing so would be a political calculation, as the Democrats will seek to enlist the support of other parties on the national level and in local governments throughout Serbia. DS Vice President and Vojvodina Assembly President Bojan Pajtic told Serbian pro-DS daily Blic on May 27 that other parties may join the coalition, if it served a greater interest. "We haven't considered involving the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) in the (provincial) government, something like that could only happen if it was in a greater interest, to constitute a pro-EU republic government and constituting pro-EU governments in the vast majority of cities and municipalities in Vojvodina and Serbia, including Belgrade," Pajtic told Blic.

¶5. (SBU) Canak said he would discuss his coalition's role in the Vojvodina government with DS leaders at a meeting on May 27. With a DS absolute majority, he was not certain Together for Vojvodina would be part of the province's government. Hungarian Coalition leader Istvan Pasztor told us May 27 that he was both disappointed because the Hungarians did not take more seats and satisfied that the democratic forces won so strongly. Pasztor said he was waiting to hear from President Tadic about negotiations for both the national and Vojvodina governments. Pasztor said the Hungarians would have no new conditions for participating in either and he was sure he could come to an agreement with DS.

Comment

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¶6. (SBU) The Democrats' strong win in autonomous Vojvodina provides a clear message regarding the pro-EU political wishes of many of Vojvodina's voters. The democratic win is also a timely boost to the DS in its negotiations with the Socialists -- and others -- to form a national government. The DS should seize the momentum and secure a functioning coalition on the national level as soon as possible; the Vojvodina win is definitely a shot in the arm. End Comment.
MUNTER